

Friday, January 18, 2013

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Ben Ray Luján of New Mexico’s Third District highlighted more than \$10.2 million that has been awarded to New Mexico counties to support local schools and roads as well as wildfire protection programs. The funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture are part of \$323 million for 41 states and Puerto Rico as a result of the one-year reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act.

“New Mexico’s national forests are one of the many natural wonders that make the Land of Enchantment such a special place,” Congressman Luján said. “This important program shares the revenue generated from national forests with our counties. It is vital to strengthening rural areas and ensuring we have the resources to build stronger communities. Sadly, we know firsthand in New Mexico the devastating impact of wildfires. These funds will also play an important role to ensure the health of our forests by putting in place wildfire prevention plans.”

New Mexico will receive \$10,264,288 to fund rural public schools and public roads in addition to projects to help maintain and improve the health of forests. Some of the notable programs include “Firewise Communities” – a program that encourages local solutions for wildfire safety by involving homeowners, community leaders, planners, developers, and firefighters. The funds also assist with reimbursements for emergency services on national forests and the development of community wildfire protection plans.

The following counties in northern New Mexico are eligible to receive funds after submitting their application to USDA: Bernalillo, Colfax, Los Alamos, McKinley, Mora, Rio Arriba, Santa Fe, San Miguel, Sandoval, and Taos.

Since 1908, the Forest Service has shared with states 25 percent of gross receipts from timber sales and other land use fees – including grazing, minerals, and recreation fees – to benefit public schools and public roads in the counties in which the forests are situated. In 2000, Congress passed the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act that provided enhanced, stabilized payments to more states through 2006. The act was extended for one year and then reauthorized in 2008 for four more years. Last year’s reauthorization provides benefits for an additional year.

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